

In the Claims

1. (Currently amended) A process for distilling paraffinic hydrocarbons to obtain usable wax products comprising the steps of:

feeding a Fischer-Tropsch derived paraffinic hydrocarbon feedstock comprising heavy paraffinic hydrocarbons and, optionally, light paraffinic hydrocarbons, medium paraffinic hydrocarbons or a mixture thereof, into a vacuum distillation column;

withdrawing from the distillation column an overhead stream, a bottom stream comprising wax products, and at least one side stream comprising wax products;

operating the distillation column so that there is substantially no thermal degradation of the feedstock or of the wax products, with the wax products of the bottom stream and of the at least one side stream thus being usable wax products; and

obtaining usable wax product from said bottom stream and/or said at least one side stream.

2. (Previously Presented) A process according to Claim 1, wherein the Fischer-Tropsch derived paraffinic hydrocarbon feedstock comprises, in addition to the heavy paraffinic hydrocarbons, the medium paraffinic hydrocarbons and the light paraffinic hydrocarbons.

3. (Previously Presented) A process according to Claim 2, wherein the operation of the distillation column is such that it produces, as the usable wax products, hard wax and medium wax, with the distillation column also producing paraffins.

4. (Original) A process according to any one of Claims 1 to 3 inclusive, wherein the distillation column is operated under vacuum.

5. (Original) A process according to Claim 4, wherein the distillation column has a

sump, with the distillation column being operated such that the pressure in the column is from 1 to 12 mbar (a), and the temperature in the column sump is from 190°C to 350°C, and with the bottom stream being withdrawn from the sump.

6. (Original) A process according to Claim 5, which includes cooling the bottom stream, and recycling up to 10% by volume of the bottom stream to the sump, as a sump quench.

7. (Original) A process according to any one of Claim 1 to 6 inclusive, which includes feeding stripping steam into the distillation column, to adjust the relative volatility of components in the feedback.

8. (Previously Presented) A process according to Claim 1, wherein the distillation column contains structured packing as a distillation medium, with the structured packing having a surface area, in m^2 , ratio of 125:1 to 750:1.

9. (Previously Presented) A process according to Claim 8, wherein a plurality of the side streams are provided, with the distillation column including a draw point or zone for each of the side streams as well as for the overhead and bottom streams, and with a plurality of distillation stages being provided in the distillation column, with each stage comprising the structured packing.

10. (Original) A process according to Claim 9, wherein the structured packings of the different stages have the same surface area to volume ratios.

11. (Original) A process according to Claim 9, wherein the structured packings of at least some of the stages have different surface area to volume ratios.